

NEWTOWN SURVEY REPORT 1984

L.E.L. Cox

The Twenty-Sixth Survey was held at Newtown this year from Wednesday May 11th to Wednesday May 30th. The advance party arrived a day earlier, as the weather deteriorated and rain settled in. As we left the landing stage at Cassey Bridge the first rain arrived.

Our advance party consisted of Paul Burland and Nick Osborne from the VIth Form, Michael Atkinson, Colin Newbold and Matthew Parker from the IVth. We were transported by the Warden, Pat Ewbank and Sandy Leath from the National Trust. Sandy's capacious boat was a great asset as we were able to move all our stores in one journey. We were soon ashore and at work establishing the camp for the main party. It is to the credit of all concerned that all necessary preparations were satisfactorily completed by the late evening despite the weather conditions.

We had to make a late night boat trip in order to phone for missing stores which duly arrived the following day with the main party at 11.00 hours.

The new arrivals comprised 3rd year students, Tim Eccles, Wayne Eggerton, Michael Garrett, Karl Smout, Peter Turner, and Peter Lillington from the IVth and Tracy Hart, a former student who was to be my assistant for this year.

Tracy has attended the Newtown camp since she was a student at School and has maintained contact since leaving, successfully completing her course at Horticultural College, working in Germany for a year and returning again to assist as an efficient and well informed leader. My thanks are due to her for all the work she undertakes and the readiness with which she was prepared to act as a voluntary leader.

I was pleased that two former students, Wayne Tyler and Neil Oakley were able to join us; their experience and knowledge was welcome in organising activities and instructing our new recruits. Wayne did admirable work in setting up, maintaining hides and organising bird watching. Neil continued with his transect on the North shore and was able to update and maintain his records.

Our party changed in the second of the two weeks with most of the third year leaving. They were replaced by a VIth Form group which included Jeanette Norris, Elizabeth Price, Anne Chambers, Colin Bell, Graham Williamson and Nicholas Cox.

Our survey work ranged over the activities detailed below. It was hampered by adverse weather conditions. Our weather notes read as follows:-

Wed 16th	Rain at start, damp, dull, grey. A cold night.
Thu 17th	Start grey and dull, clearing with some fine sun. Cold night.
Fri 18th	Started cold. Fine sunny day. Cold night.
Sat 19th	Started cold. Fine sunny day. Cold night.
Sun 20th	Blustery – wet – cold.
Mon 21st	Cold – windy – rain all day.

Tue 22nd	Cold – windy – rain all day – very muddy. Students confined to tents and study tents. Normal meals however with students dispersed under cover. Rain easing towards evening. A cold, wet night with gale.
Wed 23rd	Change over day. 3rd Years leave – last of VIth Formers arrive. Weather improves – a little warmer. Wind SE. Fresh – good for drying up the mud. A quiet, warmer night.
Thu 24th	A fine, warm morning, the best so far. All at work – students in hides – photographers searching. A double water run. Matthew P spots a lizard sunbathing near W point, South shore.
Fri 25th	Fine sunny morning – Afternoon rain which then continued through Saturday, Sunday, Monday. Continuous rain with strong, cold winds. Survey work continues but we are in a sea of mud and continually wet.
Tue 29th	Fine and dry. Enables us to dry out and prepare for breaking camp. We have to be ready by 11.00 on Wed.

Despite the variable weather conditions we were able to complete an extensive work schedule.

Mammals

Small mammal trapping was completed within the camp site as usual. Records note a significant increase in the population of bank voles, the wood mice remain steady and there was an increase in the numbers of common shrew.

Actual figures compared with 1983 are:-

	Total Catch 1983	Recapture	Total Catch 1984	Recapture
wood mice	90	72	96	78
bank vole	1	0	189	177
common shrew	1	0	9	2

A transect through the main trapping site was completed by Colin Newbold and is on display in the exhibition. Colin, Matthew Parker and Paul Burland were the principal organisers of this work which was effectively and accurately completed.

Colin Newbold continued with his rabbit studies. His maps and details of the territory covered by individual rabbits provides an interesting and accurate study. There was an increase in the number of rabbits resident within the camp-site this year. This appears to coincide with the activities of the local farmer who has removed hedges and slashed areas of bramble thicket. The consequence is that we have evidence of rabbit activity in scratching holes along banks within the camp site and an increase in the numbers of resident rabbits that have constructed new tunnels.

Paul Burland continued with his attempts to locate the roosting sites of the bats that we see on many evenings. Although no site has been identified he has taken a step nearer with the aid of Frank Heap and his bat detector plus the united efforts of all the students in camp placed as spotters to determine the flight paths of the bats. These are shown in the display and seem to locate an unexplored site in a copse on the North shore, adjacent to the camp site on the East. Brick kilns do not appear to provide roosts as we had expected. The Dark Pond needs further checking.

Using the frequencies picked up on the detector the range is within that of the pipistrelle, as we had suspected.

The bats only appeared on warm evenings so we were limited to three observations. When they were flying, the first appearances were about 12.15 with a steady increase in sightings until they tailed off and stopped at 22.03, the latest recording.

Birds

An interesting fortnight for the bird watchers this year with more species closer to the site than we have seen in recent years.

Wayne Tyler returned with his usual enthusiasm to organise the hides and was well supported by Wayne Eggerton and Karl Smout who found a developing interest in bird watching. They were further motivated by discovering a linnets nest in the meadow. They subsequently maintained a careful watch as is shown by their records. Hides were erected to the North of the camp. Temporary bridges had to be built to gain access but the effort proved worthwhile as four brent geese and eider duck were observed in addition to nests of black headed gull, lapwing and oyster-catcher which were eventually located. The gull had its nest destroyed during the night of Wednesday 25th, the remains of egg shell providing evidence of some predator.

The black headed gulls had a bad season as the usual nests along the sea wall had been washed out prior to our arrival. The only nesting bird remaining was the great black back gull that has become a regular feature during the last ten years but not successfully breeding until three years ago and not since.

The oystercatchers nested on the seaward edges of the salting but had not hatched before we left. The lapwing had not laid before our departure. The excellent sequence of photographs of the redshank observed on the salting is encouraging as we hoped that this bird may return to breed in the area from which it has been missing recently.

The redshank shots plus the little terns and shelduck is the work of Paul Burland. He had his equal in Nick Osborne who has excellent pictures ranging from the small birds, such as his willow warbler, to his magnificent picture of turnstones in flight and the great black back gull on the sea wall.

The hide towards the West point provided an excellent vantage point for general observations, many of the birds on our species list were observed from this point.

A natural hide was constructed inside the bushes beside the fresh water ponds providing an excellent position to observe birds seeking fresh water. Peter Turner enjoyed a visit from twenty-four shelduck during one of his vigils in this hide.

Karl, Wayne E and Peter produced some fine plaster casts. One in particular of oystercatchers' foot marks includes the probe holes made by the beak.

Matthew Parker completed his second survey of local chaffinches and has an excellent record on display. We took his work along with us to display at the Young People and Environment Group, a two day course held on the Island for advisers and teachers throughout the South of England.

Botany

Elizabeth Price and Jeanette Norris continued with their flower studies this year; Elizabeth preparing for her 'A' level work by identifying shade plants and checking light intensities. Jeanette has maintained her transect of the East of the landing stage from a fresh water pond, across the meadow and to the waters edge. Her 'A' level project will show changes in soil water content, humus content and salinity. A noteworthy discovery is our first record of an adders tongue fern located just below the pond. This plant is abundant at some locations within the district but this appears to be the first time that it

has been seen and identified at Brickfields. Our thanks to Jonathan Cox who spotted it as we were working our way down the transect in pouring rain, just one small specimen.

Erosion

Colin Bell has updated his computer file with his records of cliff erosion on the North shore. There is considerable loss of material as can be seen in the comparative transects exhibited in the display.

We have not had to move the initial datum line but the time is not far away when it will have to be moved further inland.

Colin was again joined in his work this year by Peter Lillington who has an equally good record registering erosion of material.

Michael Atkinson started his first work on the cliff this year and will be able to continue for a couple of years to come.

The photographs in the display, once again, illustrate mud flows that form on the cliff face when any period of heavy, continuous rain is experienced. Colin leaves for university this year so we may not see him at Newtown for some time. We wish him well, he has established some good records over the last four years. He it was who led the team in the talk to the Environmental conference.

Fossils

This aspect of our studies was once again restricted. Access to the outer beds was again restricted. Only the tops of the banks were uncovered for a few minutes before the tide returned.

The zoster beds appeared to be in good shape with good growth and healthy specimens. Inspection of these beds was also difficult because of the tides.

The main mussel bed yielded small pieces of both bison and elephant bones.

Insects

The moth trapping was unrewarding, we have only one record – that of a brimstone caught on the night of Friday 18th. Wet days and cold nights did not encourage either pupils or moths to emerge.

During warm sunny periods butterflies were in evidence but we only recorded specimens of wall, meadow brown and small meadow. Even our usual speckled woods were missing.

Pond dipping

This activity was again popular yielding a wide variety of specimens, both plants and animals which serve to give a picture of the web of life associated with a given habitat. The display includes the detailed mapping of the pond and its associated species. It has been checked and updated during the last three years and exhibits a stable habitat. The charts and pictures were included in our display to the Environmental Group. All third year pupils were involved in this work as a starting point for their studies.

Photography

This years collection of slides is evidence of the growing expertise of our senior students and of the success of our younger students.

We were pleased to have the use of a 35mm Halina camera given to us by Mr David

Parr, one of the old boys. It allowed newcomers to learn all the basic skills using good equipment.

As ever we had the full support of Oliver Frazer in his provision of cameras and subsequent developing and printing.

Wardening

We had few visitors, the weather and conditions saw to that, although we were pleased to see some of our parents, Mr and Mrs Hart and Mr and Mrs Newbold. Our Headmistress, Miss Dorothy Moir MA paid us her first visit whilst Mrs Margaret Evans who retired this year as Deputy Headmistress, paid us her last official visit, though we hope to see her in years to come.

Mr and Mrs Frank Heap, from the National Trust were welcome visitors. Frank played a large part in directing the bat watches.

Mr Tony Fisher was with us for the first time this year. He provided the opportunity for some of our pupils to learn canoeing.

A considerable amount of work was put into erecting gateways, to enable the site to be fenced, to prevent the ground being poached by cattle. This should allow control of cattle movement. Colin Newbold proved to be our most able builder.

The site was scavenged for all litter and scrap, it was bagged and left to be hauled away in a skip during the summer months.

The landing stage was refurbished and strengthened. It gets more precarious each year as the bank is getting washed away inshore. We cleared a mud berth this year beside the landing stage.

In concluding this report I must not forget to mention the excellent water colours completed by Michael Garrett. They show his talent and form a welcome addition to the display.

Considering the variable weather and some continuous periods of cold, wet conditions, the amount of work completed was quite extensive. It is a credit to the resilience and spirit of our students who continued with their studies in adverse conditions.

My thanks must go to Oliver Frazer who is always ready in the background to support us, to Sandy Leath for his efficient shipping of our equipment and to the Warden, Pat Ewbank for his continuing support.

I was also pleased to have the help of Mrs Sue Nelson in the final stages of camp. The final packing up is always hectic as we have to be ready for the tide. Her quiet efficiency and organisation is always appreciated.